



WESTERN NEWS

Libby MT 59923

Wednesday & Friday

MAR 5 2004

Superior Clipping Service

Glendive MT 406-377-6612

Asbestos-related disease

A recently released study by the Washington, D.C., based Environmental Working Group says that ten thousand Americans die a year from asbestos-related disease and the numbers appear to be increasing.

The report says that in the next 10 years more than 100,000 people in the U.S. will die from one of four asbestos-related diseases – mesothelioma, asbestosis, lung cancer and gastrointestinal cancer.

While most deaths are attributed to asbestos-industry workers, more than a million Americans are exposed to asbestos at work and another million are exposed in the environment.

The EPA's Paul Peronard once told a Community Advisory Group meeting that air testing, such as being conducted around Libby, would pick up numerous and frequent hits of chrysotile asbestos in every major city in the country.

While the recent study by EWG raises some alarms about the health of Americans, the problem still exists. Asbestos is not a banned material and it continues to exist in a great many products.

On Wednesday night, the documentary "Libby, Montana," which premiered at the Dome had a segment in which Peronard is telling a geologist that his staff members went out in the year 2000 and bought nearly two dozen bags of potting soil and the majority contained vermiculite from the W.R. Grace mine in Libby 10 years after the facility ceased production.

It's not enough to be aware of the problem, we have to clean it up. And we have to stem the continued use of these toxic substances.

It's becoming painfully obvious that the federal government is continuing to block or slow the flow of EPA cleanup money into Libby. The feds are terrified that similar cleanup will spread throughout the country. A good thing to fear considering the tremolite containing mess was shipped to about 300 destinations in this country alone and spread from there.

What should really terrify the feds is the healthcare mess to follow if the EWG study is even partially correct. Especially since Congress is toying with a bill to let the responsible parties off the hook for cleanup costs or health care. – Roger Morris

Kudos

Drury Gunn Carr and Doug Hawes-Davis deserve a round of applause for their documentary "Libby, Montana." The two filmmakers debuted the finished product at the Dome theater on Wednesday night.

It does an excellent job of chronicling the Libby asbestos problem through the beginning of the home cleanups.

Before the film, Carr said, "We made as honest a film as we thought we could make."

Gentlemen, you succeeded. It could use some editing but to those of us familiar with the story, we might have a hard time agreeing where to edit.

The documentary is long – nearly two and half hours. But it accurately tells the tale of Libby with an introduction that mixes the home movies of local families with industry fluff pieces about mining and logging in northwest Montana. That eventually segues into the asbestos story we are all too familiar with and not quite comfortable hearing and seeing.

Overall, it paints a picture of Libby as a loving, caring family town where something went amiss. The local photography paints a beautiful picture of the area and toward the end, Peronard is shown and heard saying that Libby was as safe as any other community in the country as long as you stay away from the hot spots – which the EPA has been or has cleaned.

At this point, I'm not sure where local people who missed the premiere will have the opportunity to see the film. But I will find out and publish that information.

Again, good job to the documentarians who made an "honest" film. – Roger Morris